Festivals

Deepavali is a five day festival celebrated by Hindus, Jains and Sikhs. Deepavali begins between September and October and ends between October and November. Deepavali is commonly known as the “Festival of Lights” as many lights and firecrackers are illuminated during this period. The two main reasons for the celebration of Deepavali were to welcome Rama, the seventh avatar of the Supreme God Vishnu, back home after 14 years of banishment. The other was to celebrate the slaying of the demon Naraksura. The celebration of Deepavali takes place over the course of 5 days, which are, *VasuBaras, NarakaChaturdashi, LakshimiPuja, Bali Pratipada* and *Bhaiduj.* In Singapore, places such as Little India are lighted up and many activities are organized during this period to celebrate Deepavali. Schools around Singapore also celebrate Deepavali to educate the non-Hindus about the importance of Deepavali.

Hari Raya Puasa is a very important occasion that is celebrated by Muslims all over the world; Hari Raya marks the end of one month of fasting for the Muslims. The month in which Muslims fast before Hari Raya Puasa is called Ramandan. During their fasting, the Muslims do not eat or drink for twelve hours. Only the sick and the pregnant are excused from fasting. The purpose of fasting is to remind Muslims to exercise self control and submitting themselves to Allah, the Holy One. On the morning of Hari Raya, Muslims put on new clothes and go to a mosque to pray to offer their thanks to Allah and ask forgiveness from their elders. In Singapore, places such as Geylang are lit up for this festival and also an event called Korban takes place where goats, cows, sheep and camels are sacrificed to the Muslim god, Allah. The Singapore government helps the Muslim community by importing these animals from foreign countries to allow the Muslims to celebrate this event.

Chinese New Year is a celebration to commemorate the new year of the Chinese calendar. The festival falls on a different date every year ranging from the 21st of January and the 20th of February and lasts for fifteen days. During this period, adults would give out red packets to children. These red packets usually contain money or chocolate coins wrapped in gold foil. Firecrackers are also set alight during this point of time to scare away the evil spirits as the explosions from the firecrackers are extremely loud. In Singapore however, firecrackers are banned by the government due to safety issues, however, during Chinese New Year, Chinatown organizes festivals in which the government allows the use of firecrackers.

Christmas is a holiday generally observed on the 25th of December to commemorate the birth of Jesus, an important figure in Christianity. Christmas is nowadays celebrated by non-Christians around the world. Modern celebrations of Christmas consist of gift giving, exchanging of Christmas cards and the display of decorations such as Christmas trees, the hanging of mistletoe and holly. Many famous figures related to Christmas have also appeared such as Santa Claus, Saint Nicholas and Father Christmas.